User Guide to Disability Definitions

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Introduction

There are a number of different definitions of disability used in surveys to identify disabled people. The Office for Disability Issues (ODI) is encouraging the use of a single harmonised definition of disability. This definition reflects the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) definition of disability and is therefore a minimum standard for public bodies to use as part of their duties under the Disability Equality Duty (DED).

This guide is intended to explain the set of questions ODI uses to identify the DDA population and the benefits for other public bodies of doing so.

Benefits of using a common definition of disability

Disability is a complex phenomenon to measure for a number of reasons. People's understanding of definitions of disability and the concept of disability itself vary: It is possible for one person to define themself as disabled when another person with an identical condition would not. One reason for this can be a perception that 'disabled' is a stigmatising label.

In some circumstances there may be a need to identify a different group of disabled people than the group covered by the DDA. However, there are a number of reasons to also collect data on the full DDA population.

Greater harmonisation and cross survey analysis

Using a harmonised definition of disability will reduce the influence of methodological differences and provide a clearer view of changes over time in the disabled population and outcomes for disabled people.

DED requirement

The Disability Equality Duty came into force on 4 December 2006.

This legal duty requires all public bodies to actively look at ways of ensuring that disabled people are treated equally. All of those covered by the specific duties must also have produced a Disability Equality Scheme, which they must now implement.

In order to achieve disability equality authorities will need to gather evidence on the impact of their activities on disabled people. Different definitions of disability may have been used by different authorities for specific aspects of their work. To comply with the duty it is essential that public bodies consider the impact of their decisions on the full DDA population.

ODI is recommending that all government surveys collect information on the full DDA population. Where necessary, this population can be broken down to specific groups of interest.

DDA definition of disability

The Act defines a disabled person as a person with 'a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.'

Meaning of long-term effect

- One which has lasted at least 12 months;
- is likely to last 12 months; or
- is likely to last for the rest of the person's life.

Meaning of day-to-day activity

This is not defined, but covers activities people do on a daily or regular basis such as shopping, reading and writing, talking, social activities, caring for oneself and others (washing, getting dressed, eating etc), walking and travelling by various forms of transport.

List of capacities

A normal day-to-day activity must affect one of a list of capacities, which the Act sets out:

Mobility;
Manual dexterity;
Physical co-ordination;

Continence;
Ability to lift, carry or otherwise move everyday objects;
Speech, hearing or eyesight;
Memory or ability to concentrate, learn or understand; or
Perception of the risk of physical danger.

There are some special provisions, for example:

- anyone who would meet the above criteria in the absence of medication are covered by the DDA
- anyone that has been diagnosed as having cancer, HIV infection or multiple sclerosis are automatically covered by the DDA.
- where in the past the person was disabled they are still covered by the DDA

This is the population the public bodies are required consider under the DED.

Recommended questions to identify the DDA population

The questions the ODI recommends using to identify this population are:

1. Do you have any long-standing physical or mental impairment, illness, or disability? By ‘long-standing’ I mean anything that has troubled you over a period of at least 12 months or that is likely to affect you over a period of at least 12 months.

2. Does this/Do these health problem(s) or disability(ies) mean that you have substantial difficulties with any of these areas of your life?

- Mobility (moving about)
- Lifting, carrying or moving objects
- Manual dexterity (using your hands to carry out everyday tasks)
- Continence (bladder and bowel control)
- Communication (speech, hearing or eyesight)
- Memory or ability to concentrate, learn or understand

- Recognising when you are in physical danger
- Your physical co-ordination (eg. balance)
- Other health problem or disability
- None of these

These two questions taken together identify those people with a current disability according to the DDA. These questions have been designed and cognitively tested to reflect those likely to be protected under the DDA.

Based on a slightly different version of these questions[1], the government estimates there are over 10 million disabled people in Britain. The ODI is currently working to update the questions used on the FRS for government estimates.

These are the questions the government uses for its estimates of the number of disabled people. However, these two questions do not give the full DDA population; further questions are needed to get the full DDA population. The full set of questions is given at Annex A.

The government estimate of the number of disabled people is based on the Family Resources Survey, which currently does not include the full set of questions. However, the ODI is looking to the FRS to use the complete and up to date set of questions and government estimates of the number of people covered by the DDA will reflect this.

Identifying disabled children

The questions to identify disabled children mirror those to identify disabled children and are given in Annex B. We define children as those under 16 years old and 16 to 18 year olds in full time education.

As with adults, the government estimate of the number of disabled children is based on those with a current disability. Based on this, the government currently estimates there are 700,000 disabled children in Britain.

[1] Question 1 currently begins 'Do you have any long-standing, illness, disability or infirmity?

Annex A: Questions that underlie the government's current official estimate of disability (for adults)[2]

Question Number	Comments	Question Wording
1.		Do you have any long-standing physical or mental impairment, illness, or disability? By 'long-standing' I mean anything that has troubled you over a period of at least 12 months or that is likely to affect you over a period of at least 12 months. 1. Yes 2. No
2.	Ask if answer to Q1 is '1. Yes' . Show respondent card listing these areas of difficulty.	Does this/Do these health problem(s) or disability(ies) mean that you have substantial difficulties with any of these areas of your life? Please read out the numbers from the card next to the ones which apply to you. PROBE: Which others? 1. Mobility (moving about) 2. Lifting, carrying or moving objects 3. Manual dexterity (using your hands to carry out everyday tasks) 4. Continence (bladder and bowel control) 5. Communication (speech, hearing or eyesight) 6. Memory or ability to concentrate, learn or understand

[2] With amendment changing reference to any 'illness, disability or infirmity' to 'physical or mental impairment, illness or disability'. This wording is not currently in the FRS.

		7. Recognising when you are in physical danger 8. Your physical co-ordination (eg. balance) 9. Other health problem or disability 10. None of these Probe and code at this question all substantial difficulties the illness causes the respondent. This is important to allow DWP to capture and analyse the extent to which disabilities/health problems affect the areas of respondents' lives.
3.	Ask if answer to Q2 is '10. None of these'.	Can I just check, do you receive medication or treatment without which your health problems (when taken together), would substantially affect your life in the areas we have been discussing? 1. Yes 2. No
4.	Ask if answer to Q1 is '2. No' or answer to Q3 is '2. No' (having previously answered Q2 '10. None of these').	Have you ever had a long-term physical or mental impairment, illness, or disability that affected your activities? (By long-term, I mean lasting for a year or more). 1. Yes 2. No
5.	Ask if answer to Q4 is '1.Yes'	Did this health problem or disability (Did these health problems or disabilities, when taken singly or together,) substantially limit your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities? If you were receiving medication or treatment, please consider what the situation would have been without medication or treatment.

		1. Yes 2. No
6.	Question yet to be inserted on FRS. Ask if answer to Q4 is '2. No'.	Have you ever been diagnosed with any of the following conditions? 1. HIV 2. Cancer 3. Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

Annex B: Questions that underlie the government's current official estimate of disability (for children)[3]

Question Number	Comments	Question Wording
1.	For children under a year old record whether the illness/disability is considered to be long-standing in relation to the child's age	Does [NAME OF CHILD] have any long-standing physical or mental impairment, illness, or disability? By 'long-standing' I mean anything that has troubled [NAME OF CHILD] over a period of at least 12 months or that is likely to affect him/her over a period of at least 12 months. 1. Yes 2. No
2.	Ask if answer to Q1 is '1. Yes' . Show respondent card listing these areas of difficulty.	Does this/Do these health problem(s) or disability(ies) mean that [child's name] has substantial difficulties with any of these areas of his/her life? Please read out the numbers from the card next to the ones which apply. Exclude difficulties which you would expect for a child of that age. PROBE: Which others? 1. Mobility (moving about) 2. Lifting, carrying or moving objects

[3] With amendment changing reference to any 'illness, disability or infirmity' to 'physical or mental impairment, illness or disability'. This wording is not currently in the FRS.

		3. Manual dexterity (using your hands to carry out everyday tasks) 4. Continence (bladder and bowel control) 5. Communication (speech, hearing or eyesight) 6. Memory or ability to concentrate, learn or understand 7. Recognising when you are in physical danger 8. Your physical co-ordination (eg. balance) 9. Other health problem or disability 10. None of these Probe and code at this question all substantial difficulties the illness causes the respondent. This is important to allow DWP to capture and analyse the extent to which disabilities/health problems affect the areas of respondents' lives.
3.	Ask if answer to Q2 is '10. None of these'.	Can I just check, does [child's name] receive medication or treatment without which their health problems (when taken together), would substantially affect their life in the areas we have been discussing? 1. Yes 2. No
4.	Ask if child aged 1 or over and answer to Q1 is '2. No' or answer to Q3 is '2. No' (having previously	Has [NAME OF CHILD] ever had a long-term physical or mental impairment, illness, or disability that affected his/her activities? (By long-term, I mean lasting for a year or more). 1. Yes 2. No

	answered Q2 ‘10. None of these’).	
5.	Ask if answer to Q4 is ‘1.Yes’	Did this health problem or disability (Did these health problems or disabilities, when taken singly or together,) substantially limit [NAME OF CHILD]’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities? If [NAME OF CHILD] was receiving medication or treatment, please consider what the situation would have been without medication or treatment. 1. Yes 2. No
6.	Question yet to be inserted on FRS. Ask if answer to Q4 is ‘2. No’.	Has [NAME OF CHILD] ever been diagnosed with any of the following conditions? 1. HIV 2. Cancer 3. Multiple Sclerosis (MS)